

Statement of the Honorable Dana Rohrabacher
The Broadcasting Board of Governors and
Al-Hurra Television
November 10, 2005

The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations is called to order. Today the subcommittee meets to review the challenges facing United States public diplomacy efforts in the Arab world, an increasingly important component of American foreign policy.

We are fortunate to be joined by Ken Tomlinson, Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), and MOO-AFFA Harb, News Director of the Al-Hurrah television network. We look forward to their testimony.

They will be followed by a second panel of Andrew KOH-HUT of the Pew Foundation. Mr. Kohut has thought deeply about the hurdles we must clear to get our message across in the Muslim world.

American public diplomacy is a powerful tool in advancing freedom, strengthening nascent democracy, and building democratic institutions in the Middle East and beyond.

Of course our visions for the region are not consistent with some influential and powerful elements in that part of the world and are anathema to anti-Western radical Islam. Good people in the Middle East who may desire democratic government, personal freedom, economic progress are vulnerable to those preaching hatred of the West and totally reject the free and human values that we all hold dear in this country. Our efforts at public diplomacy in the Middle East then must be dedicated toward making the region less susceptible to hatred and suspicion and more accepting of the notions of liberty, justice and democracy.

It is this commitment to a better idea, a more attractive alternative to decent and peace-loving people that will carry the day.

There is a market for the work of Al-Hurra television and there is a mission that needs to be accomplished. There is an audience who are receptive to our viewpoint because democracy, human rights and religious freedom are universal values.

It is both a national security strategy and a moral imperative that we as a nation, convey these principles and values successfully.

As our colleague, the chairman of the full Committee, Rep. Henry Hyde, has said, “How is it that the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue allowed such a destructive and parodied image of itself to become the intellectual coin of the realm overseas?”

This is a haunting question that should propel our efforts here today. We need Al-Hurra, but we need an Al-Hurra that is respectful, well-run, and a positive force in a volatile region.

While realizing the challenges America faces and not expecting instant results, we do expect a level of efficiency in what we are funding. We also expect that the Broadcasting Board of Governors have the proper membership numbers and not languish in membership inconsistent with the law. The BBG cannot operate properly if there are not enough members. These are only some of the questions that need to be asked.

We need to understand the logic behind Al-Hurrah outsourcing to the Associated Press Television Network in London and to Quantum Communications in Beirut, all at a cost of several million dollars a year. Is this a subsidy to the Associated Press, which gets the product of Al-Hurra's journalists to use for its own operations? We also need to know if it is Al-Hurra policy to discourage its reporters from rushing to cover breaking news, leaving the likes of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arab-iya to be the primary source of time-sensitive information.

Questions have also been raised about a Lebanese tilt and style to reporting that may not appeal to the wider Arab audience? Finally, what are the management standards for the network's procurement? Is single-source contracting the norm? If it is, is it an acceptable pattern of practice for the Al-Hurra network and its sister radio station Sawa?

The subcommittee is interested in the answers to these and other relevant questions, as well as both panels' recommendations for public diplomacy overseas.

At this point, I yield to my distinguished colleague, Mr.
Delahunt.